

# Washington in His Years Met War Distress and Beauty of Peace at Yuletide



Victory of the Americans at Trenton in 1776 was the best Christmas gift the young struggling Nation could have received. The surrender of the Hessian troops is shown above.

George Washington's portrait painted by J. De Mare two years before his marriage and the only picture of him under 40 years of age.

The Christmas of 1777 at Valley Forge was bitterly cold and dismal. The last of his soldiers were installed in huts before Gen. Washington moved into the house of Mrs. Deborah Hewes.

## ALWAYS LOYAL GUIDE

First President Shared in Discouraging Days of Revolution When Poverty Came With Periods of Traditional Feast

By Edna M. Colman.

Sixty-six Christmases punctuated the life-span of George Washington and brought him gifts of many kinds. These Yuletides, measured by their events as he recorded them, probably present a pageant of joy, adventure, suffering, grave danger, festivity and achievement which held more thrills and strange happenings than ever fell to the lot of any other man in the course of the longest cycle of life.

Christmas came to Washington first at the lovely old Bridges of Popes Creek plantation, where he was born, and later the property of Lawrence Washington, who named it Mount Vernon, and the next half a dozen years were spent on the family farm near Fredericksburg. Up to the time of the father's death it was a jolly, happy family. Fact and tradition have combined to tell us that George's boyhood was enriched with gifts of a pony, saddle and riding clothes according to the style of the day for young gentlemen of Virginia, and these were secured in London by Capt. Augustine Washington. It is also a matter of record that young George's father provided him a soldier's suit, cocked hat and small tin sword.

After the father's death he took on harsher meaning and George's days of playtime and frolic were over. The only record of gift of his mother to her eldest son was a small pocket knife purchased by her when her regular supply order went to London. George's plan to enlist in a sea career—become what his uncle so bitterly called "a common seaman"—brought his mother's determined veto and because he gave her instant if not cheerful obedience she made him a gift of the little knife when he was about 14 (Christmas, 1745). The knife and the injunction, "Always obey your superiors," played an important part in his life. It is now treasured in the greatest memorial to his honor.

Between his father's death and the beginning of his surveying career life was not easy for this boy, denied the dream of his life to go to England for his education, as had his father and brothers. There was little money and there seems little to indicate that George had any more boyish desires gratified.

Of Christmas, 1747, his diary recorded as to his stay at Mount Vernon with Lawrence's family: "We dined on Irish goose with some beef, etc., and drank a health to our absent friends."

The next three years found young Washington in the employ of Lord Fairfax, surveying his vast estate in the Northern Neck of Virginia. He is believed to have spent the first of these Christmases at the Ferry Farm with his mother and the two others with Lord Fairfax at Greenway Court.

Christmas, 1751, was spent aboard the ship *Industry*, homeward bound from Barbados, where he had left from Barbados to recuperate, and where he had spent a month of severe illness with the smallpox. Lawrence Washington came home to die in a few months and the Christmas of 1752 was a mixture of sorrow and elation. George grieved for his best-loved brother, but the death of Lawrence's last child brought the latest estate of Mount Vernon, a dream of his boyhood that became a reality before boyhood had entirely passed. He was in Fredericksburg the latter part of November, 1752, and naturally joined the family at home.

rolled around George Washington had been commissioned by the Governor as a lieutenant colonel of the Virginia Regiment and ordered to take his troops to the Ohio to help build forts. That Christmas was spent at Belvoir, as his expense book entries indicate.

The Christmas of 1755 came amidst ability in the duty of protecting 300 miles of frontier with the insufficient force of 700 men. Twenty-three years old, he had already experienced the most grilling, nerve-testing, baptism of fire in the disastrous Braddock expedition, out of which he came unhurt, though two horses had been killed beneath him and four bullets went through his coat. Military orders took him to Fort Cumberland over the holiday of 1756, as his diary proves.

It is evident that the young master of Mount Vernon had his estate much on his mind. He rented his house during his military service and part of it until 1761, but the needs of the house pressed home to him and in 1757 he spent Christmas at Mount Vernon, planning improvements, ordering supplies and sending with them explicit instructions for careful packing of the china, etc.

Christmas of 1758 bears only the note of expenses in his account book: "December 25, 1758—By Expts. at Chizeley Order, 5s." He had met and become engaged to Martha Custis, and was on his way to resign his commission and complete all plans for his wedding within the first week of the new year.

Christmas of 1759 must have been one of the gayest, happiest of days for the young couple at Mount Vernon. The colonel had found a lovely young mistress for his home, and his wife had not only found a capable manager for her vast estate, but a loving father for her two little ones and a devoted mate for herself. The best gifts of the gods showered upon the pair. They had young, they were 27 years old, both of them, each wealthy and of assured social position, and only importance in the affairs of the Colony.

Certainly the Christmas ball and banquet at Mount Vernon the first year of their marriage was long remembered for its elegance and gaiety. Love ruled the feast and joy set the measure of the dance. How young Mrs. Martha must have planned, keeping her slaves and servants busy every moment for days and days in preparation for the event and to welcome the relatives and friends to the first Christmas celebration of the master and mistress of Mount Vernon, who were related by blood and marriage to half the country.

Two little ones to hang up stockings, two pair of happy little feet pattering excitedly through the house and the sound of sweet childish voices made it a real home to the colonel, who loved all children and his stepchildren as dearly as though they were his own. Domestic happiness so completely enveloped these two people for the next dozen years that little is recorded of their personal doings.

Christmas from earliest times was the great celebration of the year in Virginia, and the diary of George Washington shows that he spent few days from his home or private duty at the call of public or private duty. Mount Vernon drew him as a magnet. The long hours of hard riding so often entailed in his reaching home never seemed to matter to him. Christmases of 1760, 1761 and of 1762 were spent at home after an absence in each year, and without doubt he arrived laden with trinkets and toys for the children and for his "people" as he termed his slaves.

Yuletide 1763 was a season of great joy to Mrs. Mary Ball Washington, for she had the great satisfaction of having her eldest son, George, with her from December 22 until January 5.

If there was anything more than the usual round of gaiety at Mount Vernon in the Christmases of 1764 and 1765, the colonel did not leave any record of it nor did he record the names of any guests.

Belvoir, so frequently visited by the Washingtons when the roads were passable, drew the entire Washington family for the Christmas festivities in 1766. In 1767 and 1768, the holidays were home festivals, but in 1769 the colonel reached Fredericksburg on December 23 and spent the evening and had Christmas dinner with Col. and Mrs. Fielding Lewis.

Joseph Boucher, his wife and sister, accompanied by Mr. William Diggs and his four daughters and Mr. George Diggs across the river to their home, Warburton Manor. For these river trips and calls the Washingtons, Diggs, Marshalls, Masons and other families whose estates were along the river made use of large barges, usually smart and trim in appearance, especially in the summer with their gay canopies and colored fiddlers. These were manned by eight or more colored rowers, who soon made the trip across the Potomac.

Very different was the Washington household Christmas of 1773. For death had come swiftly during the summer to young Martha Custis, beloved by every one on the estate from her stepfather down to the humblest slave on the farthest-away farm.

Vastly different from all that had gone before was the Christmas of 1775. Behind him lay his private life and peaceful home. Behind him 16 busy, happy care-free years as country squire and legislator. Behind him, too, his ringing pledge to raise a thousand men and lead them to the relief of Boston. The threatening war clouds had burst over Lexington and Bunker Hill and George Washington—commander in Chief—had come to the relief of Boston and the defense of all the 13 Colonies. War held the land in its clutch, the siege of Boston was on, and the hopes of the patriot cause were resting on the broad shoulders of a commander who must create an efficient fighting machine of a patriot army from the plow, bench, forge and nets, lacking every material essential, save courage.

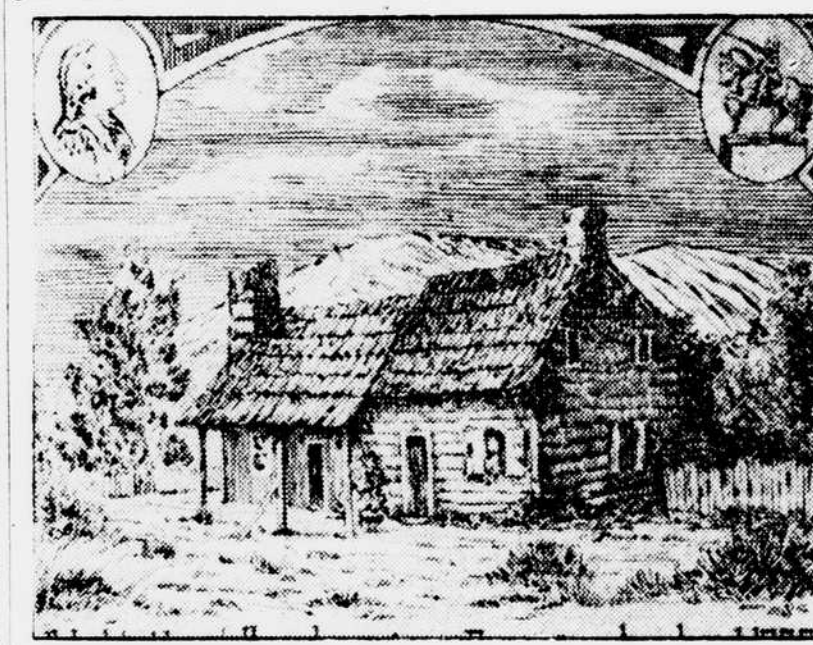
However, though there was not sufficient ammunition for a single round, this was not a dismal holiday. Mrs. Washington had arrived a few weeks before with her son and his young wife, and there was great delight in Boston's social circles and all Cambridge buzzed in anticipation. Following her arrival there was much dinner giving, calling and many parties, all of which Mrs. Washington enjoyed and considered necessary to the morale of the officers. Always a charming, gracious hostess, she organized horseback riding parties, teas and dances and by Christmas was busy with plans for a ball to create friendliness and promote good feeling. She selected January 6, then wedding anniversary, as a suitable date for the ball. Midst all of the commotion and manifold tasks and duties they had a real Christmas celebration with the little family together, and that to both Gen. and Mrs. Washington was a matter of mutual satisfaction.

The most important of all of Gen. Washington's processions of Christmases was also the most important day in the history of the American Nation—that of 1776—as it brought to the Nation a brilliant victory after a series of defeats and turned the tide of the Revolution. December of 1776 found the general at the head of a completely discouraged and demoralized army. The enthusiasm of the Colonies had waned and the patriots were in the depths of despair. The last day of the month marked the termination of the short-time enlistments and it was very doubtful if many would re-enlist. He fully realized the desperate state of affairs and knew that the only hope of the American cause in this dark hour was a striking victory by the American Army, and by military critics the world over, has been called the most brilliant military maneuver of the age.

Following this a week later with the victory of Princeton, Gen. Washington drove the British from New Jersey and back to New York and Long Island. It marked an epoch in the world's history.

ish Army to follow him until the river froze. Realizing that his escape was but temporary, as he camped upon the west bank of the Delaware above Trenton, he saw that Cornwallis had blundered by spreading his troops out too much around Trenton. Then he perfected his plan. So desperate was the venture he mapped for Christmas night that the countersign he gave his men was both cryptic and significant, "Victory or death." The general reasoned that the Hessians in Trenton, so far from home, would be engrossed in feasting and revelry and be totally unsuspecting of attack and therefore the success of the project depended upon its being a quick surprise attack.

He divided his forces into three bodies, one of which he commanded personally. The weather favored him in being a blizzard of sleet and snow. Christmas observance for the American forces began by marching through deep snow and bitter cold to McKonkey's Ferry, 9 miles above Trenton. Here hours of soul-trying labor were expended in getting the 2,500 men under his command across a storm-swept river filled with floating ice in inky darkness, but not a single man nor a single gun was lost. Nine miles of march-



Christmas of 1757 was spent on military duty at Fort Cumberland. Washington made his headquarters in the hut shown above.

ing in the teeth of a snow and sleet storm brought them to the city of Trenton, with their guns so coated with ice that they could not fire them and a hand-to-hand encounter with bayonets resulted.

As the general had surmised, the Hessians were totally unprepared for attack, and by the time their officers were aroused the victory was already won by the Americans. The arrival of the supporting troops that had come by the other road cut off their retreat and a thousand men were made prisoners. The Americans lost two soldiers by freezing to death and two were killed, and Lt. James Monroe, afterward President of the United States, was among the wounded.

The effect of this victory was magical in the reversal of public opinion it created. It was the most superb Christmas gift that Gen. Washington and the Army could have given the American people, and by military critics the world over, has been called the most brilliant military maneuver of the age.

But with the Yuletide of another year, 1777, there was little of Christmas cheer. The optimism and enthusiasm of the Trenton victory had ebbed and depression was again enthroned. Christmas at Valley Forge must have been most disheartening to Gen. Washington. So great was his sympathy with his soldiers' hardships that he occupied a tent in their midst, faring no better than his men until they were all established in the log huts. On Christmas Day he moved into the little house of Mrs. Deborah Hewes near the mouth of Valley Creek. From the entries in the general's expense books Christmas at Valley Forge was a marked contrast to those of his own home.

The report of December 23 showed there were but 25 barrels of flour for the entire camp and no beef whatever. The 10 meals for 25 men from that stock must have left but a meager supply for a Christmas feast. It is also plain that they had no bread, no eggs, no flour for coffee, puddings or desserts. No tea, coffee, no milk, no sugar, hence no punch and probably neither whisky nor rum and none was issued to the men that day. Worst of all, there was a scarcity of knives, forks and

New York City was crowded with British soldiers, the harbor was filled with ships of a powerful fleet. Sir Henry Clinton was in command, and he was the stronghold of the British forces. Money that poured in from England for the pay and maintenance of the troops found its way to the coffers of the local merchants. A fleet from Ireland, laden with butter, potatoes and pork, London ships brought cargoes of costly silks, satins, velvets, lace and jewelry and all of the expensive dress accessories dictated by European styles were on sale. The shopping was gay and crowded with ladies of the Tory population, who promenaded of afternoons in their elegant gowns and handsome bonnets with officers in brilliant uniforms and gay-clad civilians.

Twenty thousand soldiers, it is said, composed the royal army that filled the entire city. A fleet of 40 warships with many merchantmen made an impressive background in the harbor. Martial music was always to be heard on the streets, with the tramp of battalions in their evolutions. The mighty army of royalists was so confident of crushing "Mr. Washington and his ragged army" that they were apparently indifferent about the time they took to do it.

Christmas in New York City presented an appearance of remarkable prosperity. Never was the royal army more powerful nor better equipped. Never were the American soldiers so mutinous and wretched. Congress had not met their needs, they were without clothes or shoes, their pay more than a year in arrears, the food scanty, and with the homesickness aggravated by the want of their families, they deserted by hundreds. Dark and dismal was the outlook to the patriots. But Gen. Washington was not dismayed. Instead he grimly set his mind to a plan with Rochambeau that in less than a year brought victory to American arms at Yorktown and changed the map of the world.

Christmas of 1781 was one of great joy throughout the land—joy that began with the news of the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, October 18, 1781.

To Mrs. Washington it was a season of deep sorrow, for it was the first holiday to find her childless. Her only son had been snatched from her in the midst of the jubilation, from which the general was summoned to the deathbed of the boy he loved and had reared as a

ton established themselves and their military family in the home of Mrs. Jacob Ford, the most pretentious house in the town, and were her guests for the following six months, as she would accept no pay. However, they were overcrowded, and to remedy this in a measure the general had two cabins built adjoining, one for a kitchen and one for an office. This also housed Col. Alexander Hamilton and Maj. Trench Tilghman. To add to the comfort the entire house was replastered.

Christmas was unusually dreary in such a desolate waste of snow and cold. There were days when the men had neither bread nor meat and many were so weak they could not perform their duties.

There was little of Christmas merriment in 1780 in Gen. Washington's heart or his headquarters at New Windsor or, indeed, anywhere among the patriots. The war had exhausted the resources of many families, nearly every house must have been in mourning. Cornwallis was master of the South; the country was impoverished and Congress without power or resources. In striking contrast to the previous year, the weather was balmy and mild. There was no ice or snow, the rivers were all open, the fields all green.

Christmas of 1781 was one of farewells. Much of the winding up of the war was done from Newburgh, where Christmas of that year was spent by the general and Mrs. Washington. They were in cramped quarters, but they had learned to adjust themselves to conditions and to meet all kinds of emergencies.

With all of the manifold duties and interruptions that attended the disbanding of the troops, the emotional strain of saying farewell to his officers, his soldiers, to the public and to Congress, Gen. Washington found time to do some shopping in Philadelphia and tucked away in his baggage a collection of trinkets for the two little ones at Mount Vernon, for whom he made Christmas joy and filled the relations of a father for the balance of his life. He bought a locket, three small pocketbooks, three sashes, dress cap, hat, children's books, handkerchief, whirlingig, fiddle and quadrille boxes.

Finally the famous accommodation by their own gateway, where the slaves and servants from the various farms had assembled to give them a rousing welcome, making the air ring with the shouts and cheers of joy that the master and mistress had again come home, and that Mount Vernon was once more restored to its proper state. Excitement and joy abounded and did not abate for days. They found a merry group of relatives awaiting them, among them Mrs. Betty Lewis and some of her family. By daylight Christmas morning Mrs. Washington was astir, taking again the reins of management of her home and getting everything ready for the day's events.

Six years of great happiness and continuous hospitality followed at Mount Vernon. All of the old tasks and pleasures were resumed. The general took great delight in his adopted children. He had made their acquaintance first at Christmas, and his devotion to them was so complete that they never missed their own father. People flocked to Mount Vernon in such a constant stream that the general called his home an "ill resorted tavern."

Guests came in such numbers that when a hundred arrived one could hardly buy butter for the table. Called upon by every public and private agency for advice, service and support, the general found he could not keep to the boundaries of Mount Vernon. Very quickly he saw his own journeyings veiled by the chaotic state of government affairs. Christmas of 1784 he spent at Annapolis, reaching there December 20 with Gen. Gates. At the request of the Assembly of Virginia, to fix matters with the Assembly of Maryland respecting the extension of the Potomac and the communication between it and the western waters. The result of this was that these two States stood together for united action, setting the precedent for the eventual union of the 13 States in accepting a constitution for the United States.

Details are entirely lacking as to the fellow guests at the Christmas dinner at Mount Vernon in 1785: of Count Castiglioni, who arrived on Christmas day in time for dinner and remained four days, before continuing his journey southward. Of Christmas, 1786, there is no record, but on Christmas, 1787, there was a party of guests who arrived early and stayed on after the holiday.

By the time another Christmas rolled around, great changes had taken place. The Washington family were in New York. The general and madame had become President of the United States and First Lady of the Land. A devoted and trusting public had called the Revolutionary hero to leadership in the highest office. Just created, for its administration, he had to guide, rule or precedent to follow, but must needs pilot the ship of state through an uncharted sea of political, financial, and economic experiment and adjustment. On the first Christmas he was head of the Nation, they went to church in the morning. Elegant in attire and imposing in manner, they and their handsome coach with their liveried attendants satisfied the public ideal, and their departure for St. Paul's was made amidst an admiring audience. It being Friday, they held a levee in the evening.

## WAR HOLIDAYS SAD

Immortal Founder Had Tributes of People as End of War Brought More Inspiring Days for Great Celebration

son. By the time the general returned to Mount Vernon for his wife she had given little Nellie, aged 2, and her baby brother, George Washington Parke Custis, aged 6 months, settled with their attendants, and, putting her grief aside, accompanied him to Philadelphia, reaching there in time to be the honor guests at the Christmas dinner at the lovely home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Morris.

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The presidential regime in Philadelphia, which began in August, 1790, when the family moved, making the journey in the fine barge prepared for the President's use at his inauguration, was very agree-

able to Mrs. Washington. They quickly established themselves in Robert Morris' house on High street. There the Christmas of 1790 was celebrated by a brilliant levee, of which the following account was written by the gay and lovely Sally McKean, just about to be married to the elegant Don Carlos de Yrujo: "You never could have seen such a drawing room; it was brilliant beyond anything you can imagine, and though there was a great deal of extravagance, there was so much of Philadelphia taste in everything that it must have been confessed the most delightful occasion of the kind ever known in this country."

"There were any Christmas festivities observed on the old joyous plan which had prevailed at Mount Vernon, the accounts of them were not included in the diaries at present available. What may have been recorded in the group of lost ones is a matter of conjecture. Thus for the holidays of 1791, 1792, 1793, and 1794 there is but little to be found. President Washington's time was in constant demand with the administration of his office.

On Christmas 1795, the President gave a dinner to the Vice President and Senators and delegates from Massachusetts, a group of 20 in all. For the description of this banquet, delegate from Massachusetts, and a guest, who sent the details to his daughter, Mrs. Hooper:

"In the center of the table was placed a piece of table furniture about 6 feet long and 2 feet wide, rounded at the ends either of wood gilded or polished metal, raised only about an inch, with a silver rim round it like a tea table. In the center was a pedestal of plaster of paris with images on it and on each end figures, male and female, of the same. It is very elegant and is used for ornament."

"The dishes were placed all around it, and there was an elegant variety of roast beef, veal turkeys, ducks, fowls, hams, etc. Puddings, jellies, oranges, apples, nuts, almonds, figs, raisins, and a variety of wines and punch. We took our leave at 6, more than an hour after candles were introduced. No lady but Mrs. Washington dined with us. We were waited on by four or five servants in livery."

For Christmas, 1796, there is no record of any special celebration. Among the notable guests during 1797-98 were Duc d'Orleans, later Louis Philippe; Dr. Brander, Montpensier and Beaujolais; C. Volney, Benjamin Latrobe, Amariah Frost, Niemcewicz, companion of Kosciuszko, besides the throng of Lewises, Daniels, and Washingtons, nieces, nephews and cousins of all of the general's brothers and his sister Betty had been claimed by death and he, the eldest, was left alone of his family. Christmas, 1797, found Mount Vernon snowbound. Winter had set in by November 1 and there was scarcely a moderate day. The roads were impassable and navigation was entirely stopped.

Never did Mount Vernon have such a brilliant year as that of 1799. That Christmas, the last one of the general's life, was one of great enjoyment. A congenial group of young people aided Nellie and for, hams, etc. Puddings, jellies, oranges, apples, nuts, almonds, figs, raisins, and a variety of wines and punch. We took our leave at 6, more than an hour after candles were introduced. No lady but Mrs. Washington dined with us. We were waited on by four or five servants in livery."

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"We reached Mount Vernon the evening before Christmas, and if anything could have added to our enjoyment it was the arrival of Gen. and Mrs. Pinckney the next day while we were dining. You may be sure it was a joyful meeting and at the very place my wishes had pointed out. To be in the company of so many esteemed friends, to hear our good General Washington, to hear of his political subjects without reserve, and to hear Gen. and Mrs. Pinckney relate what they heard and saw in France was truly a feast to me. Thus the moments glided away for two days, when our reason pointed out the propriety of our departing and improving the good roads, as the snow and frost had made them better than they are in summer. Eleven days before another Christmas dawned the spirit of Gen. George had taken its flight, his commanding figure laid in the tomb and he belonged to the ages.

By the time another Christmas

Christmas of 1790, the first one spent in the Presidential Mansion at Philadelphia, was the occasion of a brilliant reception by President and Mrs. Washington.